

Improving Early Childhood Language Skills by Telling Stories Using Finger Puppets: A Classroom Action Research

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Abstract

Language is a vital tool for human communication. Young children use it to express their thoughts, feelings, and desires. This study aimed to enhance the language skills of Group A students at PKK Ika Karya Bhakti Kindergarten in Probolinggo through storytelling with finger puppets. Employing Classroom Action Research, the researcher sought to address the limited speaking abilities of 13 out of 17 children in pronouncing sentences and recounting personal experiences. The findings demonstrate that the finger puppet approach effectively improved the language skills of these young learners. Specifically, language skills increased from 48% before the intervention to 72.4% after Cycle I and further to 83.8% after Cycle II. Finger puppets can be a valuable tool for helping young children develop their language skills, especially those who may struggle to express themselves verbally.

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INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings who rely on communication. To communicate effectively, we need a solid grasp of language, vocabulary, and communication strategies. This statement was also supported by Sari, who stated that language for early childhood is directed at oral and written ability (symbolic) (Sari et al., 2018). According to Santrock, language is a means of communication, both spoken and written or signed, based on a system of symbols (Santrock, 2011). Vygotsky also expressed his opinion about language: "Language is significant for cognitive development. Language provides a means for expressing ideas, asking questions, and providing categories and concepts for thinking." Language is closely related to cognitive development. Language is a tool for expressing ideas and questions and producing concepts and categories for thinking (Susanto, 2014). Suryana also argued that all aspects of child development (language development aspects) must receive optimal and maximum stimulation through meaningful learning involving parents, schools, and teachers (Dadan Suryana, 2014).

From the opinions of these experts, language is a tool humans use to communicate in everyday life. For early childhood children, language is used to convey what they think, what they want, their hopes, requests, etc. Therefore, it is indispensable to stimulate aspects of children's language development. The development of children's language aspects must be allowed, separated from speaking and listening activities.

Language has several characteristics; as stated by Nuriani, language is systematic, namely a way of combining sounds and writing in an orderly, standard, and consistent manner. Language is arbitrary, consisting of relationships of various kinds of sounds and objects -visual objects like ideas. Language is flexible and can change according to the times. Language is diverse, has various ways of speaking, and is complex. The ability to think and reason is influenced by the ability to use Language (Nuriani et al., 2014).

According to Mursid, there are general stages in children's language skills development, namely (1) Reflexive vocalization (0-3 weeks of age). Babies can cry in the form of a reflex. (2) Babbling, namely a baby crying when he feels thirsty or uncomfortable, and the types of crying can be differentiated. (3) Lalling is starting to hear voices, but they still need to be made clear. (4) Echolalia: at this stage, the baby begins to imitate the sounds heard around him. (5) True Speech occurs when babies reach the age of 18 months or are called toddlers and begin to speak correctly, but their pronunciation is not like that of adults in general (Mursid, 2015).

In developing language, children can use various methods, including storytelling methods using exciting media. Suryana stated that for the development of early childhood children, they are pretty interested in picture storybooks. Using other engaging media will arouse children's interest and desire to carry out these activities. Storytelling is an effort to deliver or present material to the child through learning from the teacher. The aim of telling stories to children is so that children can listen to what other people say, to train children to be able to ask questions if they do not understand, to ask simple questions and children to be able to answer them, and so that children can express what they hear. It supports the child's language aspects (Dadan Suryana, 2014). Caulfield also stated that he supports the statement that by telling stories to children to improve children's verbal language skills, story language can help children use their language correctly and expand children's

vocabulary so that children can become skilled in finding the right words for children to use in speaking (Işitan & Doğan, 2015).

This opinion proves that telling stories to children can develop aspects of language development. Apart from training children to listen, telling stories can also develop children's cognitive abilities because children can imagine in their minds. Children can also tell what they hear according to the understanding they get. To support the previous statement, Madyawati stated the benefits of stories for young children: 1). Reading stories to children can shape a child's personality and morals, 2). By telling stories, children can channel their imagination and fantasy. When children listen to stories, their imaginations will be stimulated. The imagination that is built when children listen to stories will have a positive influence on the child's ability to solve problems. 3). Telling stories can stimulate children's verbal abilities, and telling stories can encourage children to enjoy talking (Madyawati, 2016).

Apart from giving stories to children, we need to pay attention to language that is easy for children to understand. The first is (1) vocabulary adapted to the child's language development stages (a) For children aged four years, it contains easy words based on more than 1500 words acquired by children; for five-year-olds, it contains less than 3000 words; and for six-year-olds, 6000 words. (b) Avoid much vocabulary, (c) Words considered necessary can be repeated in the story. The second is (2) The sentence structure is adjusted to the child's level of mastery (a) Following Piaget's theory, stories for four-year-old children contain four words in one sentence, five words in one sentence for five-year-old children, and for six-year-old children contains six words in one sentence. (b) Long sentences should be broken down into several sentences. (c) It can be introduced to various types of sentences: active, passive, and compound.

In line with this opinion, Reeta and Jasmine stated that the aim of storytelling activities is language development in children, namely by increasing children's vocabulary; with this activity, children can connect words with actions, remember a series of ideas. or events, and can foster self-confidence in children (Rahayu, 2013). So, telling stories to children can develop various aspects of development in children, one of which is language development. Telling stories to children can increase the child's vocabulary through what they hear. When telling stories, children also invite children to communicate indirectly. It will enable the child's linguistic aspects to develop well.

So, the storytelling method using finger puppets is expected to train children's concentration and provide learning experiences to practice listening, which helps develop children's linguistic aspects. The opinion expressed by Ulfah also supports this statement that telling stories using finger puppets can train children's language skills because children listen to stories using visual tools so that they will never forget them (Made et al., 2016). Dhieni believes finger puppets are usually made using simple tools or only fingers with images on them. Apart from that, finger puppets can also be created using tools and materials such as flannel, which is sewn on both sides; the size is adjusted to the size of the fingers, and then a character is formed according to the theme the teacher wants to tell the child (Puspasari et al., 2016). This research aims to improve language skills through storytelling using finger puppet media in Group A children of the PKK Ika Karya Bhakti Probolinggo Kindergarten.

METHOD

This type of research is Classroom Action Research. Suharsimi Arikunto stated that classroom action research examines learning activities in the form of actions deliberately created and occurring in a class together. These actions are given by the teacher or with direction from the teacher, which the child carries out (Arikunto et al., 2021).

Classroom Action Research is action research to improve the quality of learning practices in the classroom. The researcher aims to solve the problem in the form of speaking skills for 13 out of 17 children in Group A of PKK Ika Karya Bhakti Kindergarten, which is located in Probolinggo in pronouncing sentences when answering and telling stories of experiences or events that have not developed optimally and the limited ability of most teachers in using media to develop children's speaking skills. In solving this problem, researchers used the method of telling stories with hand puppets.

This research, which lasted for two months, from August to October 2023, was carried out collaboratively and participatively; the researcher, in the process, collaborated with the class teacher. The class teacher is the implementer, and the researcher is the observer who observes all the changes in the child. Researchers are involved in planning research, observing, recording, collecting, analyzing, and making reports on research results.

Researchers carrying out this research used the research model from Kemmis and Taggart, which Wijaya Kusuma and Dedi Dwitagama modified. Figure 3 is a chart of the classroom action research model proposed by Kemmis and Taggart below:

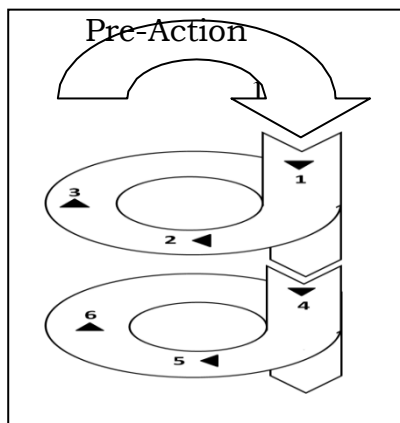


Figure 3. Modified Kemmis and Mc Taggart Classroom Action Research Model (Kusuma & Dwitagama, 2012).

Information:

1= Cycle I Planning

2= Cycle I Actions and Observations 3= Cycle I Reflection

4= Planning Cycle II

5= Actions and Observations Cycle II 6= Reflection Cycle II.

Kemmis and Mc Taggart's research model has four steps in one Cycle, after the fourth step, then returning to the first step, and so on; although the nature is different, the second and third steps are carried out together. The

four steps include planning, enacting, observing, and reflection (Kemmis et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the modification lies in the Pre-Action. Pre-action is an activity carried out before Cycle I. In this activity, the researcher makes observations about the conditions in the classroom. Indicators of the success of the action are individual completeness criteria of 70 and classical learning completeness of 85%.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Pre-Action Stage

Before taking action, the researcher made observations in the form of pre-action activities carried out. The story in the Pre-Action stage is entitled "Gift for Azi." This story is about a child named Azi. Azi came home from school, and on the road, Azi met a thirsty duck. Then Azi helped the duck by giving it water. Azi then took the duck back to its owner, the farmer. Arriving at the farmer's house, Azi handed the duck to the farmer.

Nevertheless, the farmer did not want to accept it. The farmer gave the duck to Azi because Azi had helped the duck. Azi was thrilled and promised to take good care of the duck.

In this research, language skills pre-action activities were carried out using data collection techniques in the form of observation. The indicators assessed in Pre-Action are being able to speak clearly so that they can be understood, retelling stories fluently, and forming coherent sentences. In this activity, the teacher presents a story without media. While this activity was taking place, most children were chatting with other friends. When children are asked to retell the story's contents, most children need help explaining the story. There were even some children who did not want to come forward to tell their stories.

When advanced, children still need to be able to retell the contents of the story fluently. Children can tell the story's contents after the teacher assists in the form of questions to the children. Children only tell the story's content as asked by the teacher or tell stories based on the teacher's questions. Children only say words/phrases, not yet sentences. Children often need to remember the contents of the story the teacher has just told.

The results showed that language skills were not optimal; in pre-action, they were 48%. Thus, children's language skills through storytelling have yet to develop optimally. The results of Pre-action language skills are presented in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1. Achievement of Pre-action Language Skills

Indicator	Amount	Percentage
Able to speak the language well so that it can be understood	8	53%
Children can express ideas fluently	7	43%
Able to form sentences coherently	7	48%
Average	7	48%

Based on the observation results, it can be seen that the pre-action results using the observation sheet (checklist) on the indicator of being able

to speak language clearly so that it can be understood, the percentage achieved was 53%, for the indicator of being able to express ideas fluently the percentage achieved was 43%, and for the indicator of being able to form sentences coherently, the percentage achieved was 48%. The average language skills at the Pre-action stage is only 48%. A situation like this becomes a basis for researchers to take action to improve language skills. Based on the results of learning observations, the researcher and collaborators designed actions for learning activities in Cycle I and used the storytelling method using finger puppets.

2. Cycle I

Researchers and teachers carry out observations or observations during the learning process. At each meeting, the observer observes, assesses, and documents all actions taken by the child. In observation activities, what is observed is the child's language ability when the child retells the content of the story presented by the teacher. The indicators observed are being able to speak the language well so that it can be understood, retell stories fluently, and form sentences coherently.

In Cycle I of the First Meeting, most children were enthusiastic about listening to the story. However, some children were still busy in the middle of the story and disturbed others. However, when asked to retell the story in front of the class, some children did not dare to come forward. Some children are reluctant to come forward to tell stories. Children want to move forward after being motivated by the teacher. At the Second and Third Meetings, the children were enthusiastic about listening to the story, and the children dared to come forward to tell the story even though some children still needed to be fluent in telling the story. The sentences spoken are coherent. The results of observations in Cycle I regarding children's speaking skills can be explained in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2. Achievement of Speaking Skills Cycle I

Indicator	Amount	Percentage
Able to speak the language well so that it can be understood	11	75.8%
Able to retell stories fluently	10	66.7%
Able to form sentences coherently	11	74.7%
Average	11	72.4%

Based on Table 2, the average data on children's language skills is 72.4%. Thus, the average language skills of children in implementing Cycle I actions have increased by 24.4%. That is evidenced by the average language skills of children in pre-action, which are only 48%, increasing in Cycle I to 72.4%.

Seeing the conditions in Cycle I, where there are still several obstacles, improvements are needed. After discussing with the class teacher/collaborator, a basis can be developed to improve and perfect the next Cycle of class actions, namely 1) Before telling the story, the teacher motivates the children to dare to tell the story. 2) The teacher arranges the children's seats. Children who talk a lot do not sit with children who talk a

lot, too. 3) Using a puppet stage so that children are more interested in listening to the story. 4) Giving awards, initially just stars written on a blackboard, was replaced by giving awards in the form of smile necklaces.

3. Cycle II

As in Cycle I, observations in Cycle II were carried out during classroom learning using the observation sheet that had been made. In observation activities, the indicators observed are language skills, which include being able to speak well so that it can be understood, retell stories fluently, and form coherent sentences. The observations show that children's language skills are experiencing outstanding development. Based on the results obtained from the implementation of Cycle II, when compared with the results of Cycle I, it can be seen that there has been quite a significant increase, and the success indicator has been achieved, namely at least 80% with a good criteria value.

The significant increase occurred because of several efforts made by the teacher, including the teacher guiding students to read explanatory texts about how to make conclusions, the teacher bringing students to a problem that must be solved, and the teacher strengthening students' literacy knowledge by re-explaining the material they read, from all these efforts, proved a very significant difference compared to Cycle I.

The results of observations in Cycle II regarding language skills in children can be presented in Table 3 as follows:

Table 3 . Achievement of Language Skills Cycle II

Indicator	Amount	Percentage
<i>Able to speak the language well so it can be understood</i>	13	86%
<i>Able to retell stories fluently</i>	12	80%
<i>Able to form sentences coherently</i>	13	85.6%
Average	13	83.8%

Based on Table 3, the average data on children's language skills is 83.8%. Thus, the average language skills of children in implementing Cycle II actions have increased by 11.4%. That is proven by the average child's language skills in Cycle I being only 72.4%, increasing in Cycle II to 83.8%.

Table 4 presents a recapitulation of the overall results of speaking skills using the storytelling method using hand puppets from pre-action to two actions.

Table 4. Recapitulation of Children's Language Skills Data at the Pre-Action, Cycle I, and Cycle II stages

No	Indicator	Pre-action	Cycle i	Cycle ii
1.	Able to speak the language well can be understood	53%	75.8%	86%
2.	Able to tell back to the story smoothly	43%	66.7%	80%

3.	Able to form coherent sentences	48%	74.7%	85.6%
Average		48%	72.4%	83.8%

Based on Table 4, it can be seen that the average language skills of children in each Cycle have increased. The improvement in children's speaking skills from pre-action to the end of Cycle II can be seen below.

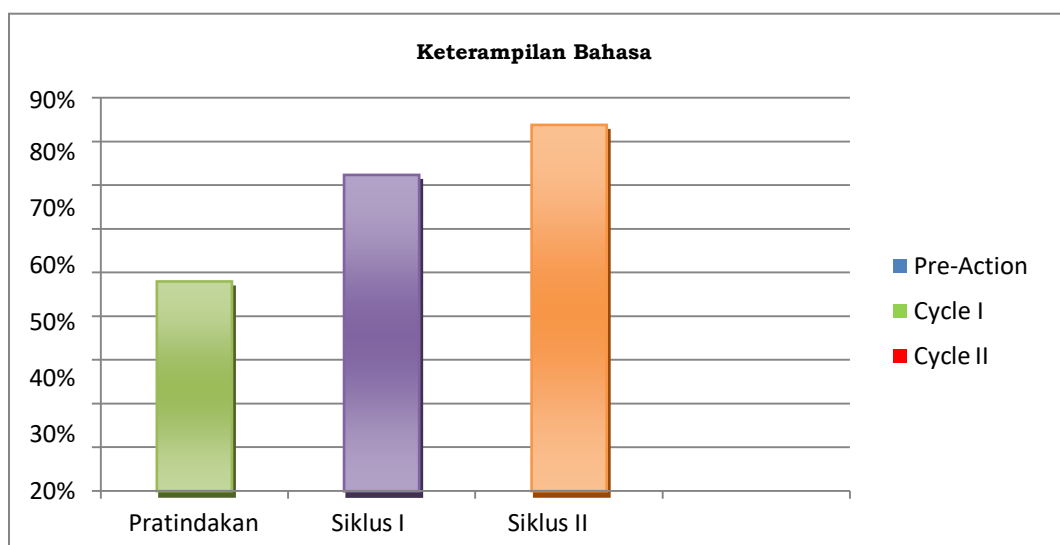


Figure 4. Graph of Recapitulation of Percentage of Language Skills in Pre-Action, Cycle I, and Cycle II

Based on the research results regarding the percentage of children's skills, the performance indicators that mark the end of the Cycle have been fulfilled. The average percentage of children's language skills increases with each Cycle. The average of children's language skills in Pre-action was 48%, increasing in Cycle I to 72.4%, and in Cycle II, it increased again to 83.8%. Based on the data obtained, using the storytelling method using finger puppets can improve children's language skills.

The research finding aligns with the results of Fadliyah and Susanto's 2021 study. Both studies indicate that using finger puppets as a tool for stimulation can significantly enhance children's language development. In a preliminary study utilizing a one-group pretest-posttest design, Fadliyah and Susanto evaluated a sample of 62 children randomly selected. The initial assessment revealed that a significant majority (88.7%) of these children exhibited limited language development. However, following the implementation of a stimulation program, there was a notable improvement, with over half (59.7%) demonstrating sufficient language skills (Fadliyah et al., 2021).

Domek and colleagues discovered that daily finger puppet play was associated with enhanced cognitive development and early language skills in infants. This suggests that a more stimulating home environment, incorporating simple toys like finger puppets, can positively influence a child's language acquisition (Domek et al., 2023). Domek's previous study revealed that finger puppets offer a cost-effective approach to fostering language-rich interactions. Preliminary findings suggest that extensive

puppet use may have long-term benefits for child development, warranting additional research (Domek et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted over two cycles, the language method using finger puppets can improve children's language skills. That is shown by the increase in language skills from pre-action on children's language skills by 48%, in Cycle I to 72.4%, and in Cycle II increasing again to 83.8%. The process of storytelling activities using finger puppets to improve language skills is: 1) The teacher tells the story, 2) The teacher conducts questions and answers about the story that has just been sung, 3) The children are asked to retell the story that has just been sung, and 4) The teacher gives an award in the form of a concrete object "smile necklace" to the child.

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